DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 372 360 CS 011 779

AUTHOR Karr, Jo Ann
TITLE An Introspective Approach to School-Based Curriculum Planning.
PUB DATE 94
NOTE 11p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Administrator Attitudes; *Curriculum Development; Educational Change; Elementary Education; Program Descriptions; *Staff Development; *Teacher Attitudes; Urban Education; *Whole Language Approach
IDENTIFIERS Chicago Public Schools IL; Teacher Surveys

ABSTRACT

An elementary school located in a predominantly black neighborhood on the south side of Chicago decided it was time to restructure the curriculum (scores lagged behind the national average and interest in reading and writing had waned). The principal, parents, and teachers were given extra encouragement to use the process of team building, shared decision making, and positive climate development as a participant in Project CANAL (Creating a New Approach to Learning). A total of 47 staff members participated in a 3-day summer seminar with the intention of becoming knowledgeable about whole language practices and the role individual staff members might assume. Responses to surveys given to participants were tallied. Replies were scattered across the range of possibilities. Two days of the seminar were devoted to a "whole language sampler," highlighting the theory and techniques of whole language. The culminating activity was a self-directed dramatization. Surveys were grouped by grade level, job titles, classroom teachers, support service teachers, support staff, and administrators. Few whole language practices were being used by the groups who were not classroom teachers, but all groups indicated a desire for some or lots of training in some component of the practices. Primary teachers indicated they were using a large number of the practices, but the intermediate teachers were using only a sprinkling of the practices. The staff commented they were particularly delighted to share their mixed feelings of challenge mixed with anxiety as they ventured away from tried and true methods. (RS)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED 372 360

AN INTROSPECTIVE APPROACH TO SCHOOL-BASED CURRICULUM PLANNING

By: Jo Ann Karr, Ed.D.
Northeastern Illinois University
5500 N. St. Louis Avenue
Chicago, Illinois 60625
Office: (312) 794-3056
Fax: (312) 794-6243

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
■ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
□ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
J. A. Karr
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

CS011779

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

An Introspective Approach to School-Based Curriculum Planning

By Jo Ann Karr, Ed.D.

Increasingly school districts are using shared governance models for implementing reform mandates. Teachers, staff, parents, administrators and community people are restructuring the instructional programs as a team while the level of expertise of school needs range from little to extensive, the shared commitment to implement change for increased student achievement is quite apparent. Gaining a common core of information about an instructional approach, exploring feelings about change and identifying professional development and training needs for a diverse group of people is essential to productive curriculum restructuring.

An elementary school located in a predominantly black neighborhood on the south side of Chicago decided it was time to restructure their curriculum. The principal, parents and teachers were given extra encouragement to use the process of team building, shared decision making and positive climate development as a participant in Project C.A.N.A.L., a federal desegregation plan. Creating A New Approach to L earning was the task directed to the school teams.

The children's scores lagged behind the national average and interest in reading and writing waned. Parents, administrators, and teachers agreed they wanted to stress writing for communication and a positive attitude towards reading achievement. Professional

development in the writing process was introduced and the purchase of fiction and non-fiction books was accelerated. A teacher team was trained in the Reading Recovery Program and a few ventured into workshops on Whole Language.

After reviewing the end-of-the-year achievement scores, the changes in instructional programming did not seem to make a difference in achievement. Teachers were puzzled because the school climate seemed better and children were swapping paperbacks and writing more often. The school team decided to reflect on how to proceed. They scheduled a three day summer seminar at Project CANAL headquarters. The entire school staff was requested to attend. The forty-seven participants included counselors, security guards, special instruction pull-out teachers, librarians, classroom teachers, clerks, and administrators. The plan was to become knowledgeable about Whole Language practices, and consider what role the individual staff member might assume to support these practices.

The first day the staff completed the Karr Whole Language Surveys. This would serve as a guide to development of presentations for the remaining sessions. The survey listed elements of Whole Language under five categories. There were Literature and Writing, Parent-Involvement, Organization of the Whole Language Classroom, Reading and Writing. The practices listed under each category were gleaned from Raines and Canady (1990) Froese (1991) Routman (1988) and other popular and often cited references on the topic.

There were three strands of requested response. Strand one asked about the current degree of use on a continuum from none, some, to a lot. Strand two asked about the respondent's present comfort level in using the practice as either excellent, getting better, or awful. Strand three asked them to report their perceived training needs as being little, some, or lots. They checked the three strands corresponding to their choice for each of the forty-three practices. (Chart 1.0)

The survey was designed to be low key and non-threatening. The respondent indicated their job position but not their names. Practices within the Whole Language approach not recorded were solicited from the group and included in the master list. After collection, the responses were tallied for each of the five categories across the three strands by practices and category.

The curriculum specialist and the school design team, did a quick study of the results. The total group's replies were scattered across the range of possibilities. Little clustering of response could be seen. However, the room buzzed with the participants talking, debating and sharing interest in the various practices. They inquired about practices that few were familiar with such as mailboxes and webbing. It was decided the next two days would be devoted to a Whole Language sampler, highlighting the theory and techniques needed in this approach. Thematic units were modeled that correlated with the district's objectives. Dramatization of literature was used to illustrate holistic reading methods. Questions and discussion was interspersed throughout the

presentation of how to assess the school's displayed literacy environment following the Loughlin and Martin's (1987) model.

The culminating activity was a self-directed dramatization , Carlton (1975) of classic repetitive stories such as Billy Goat's Gruff, Gingerbread Boy and others. Everyone enthusiastically joined a small group, read the story round-robin, retold the story in their group, and discussed the staging. Each group then role played the read story to the rest of the participants.

The assistant principal was a goat, the principal a bee, a security guard a chicken, the librarian a gingerbread boy. Everyone had a part in the spontaneous dramatizations. The comments after this experience indicated a heightened awareness of the many facets of Whole Language. This concluded the three day seminar but not the needs assessment and staff development plan to guide the school to the next stage of revising the instructional program. However, it was decided there was a clear consensus that the staff was ready to assume a role in the transition.

Recommendations of how to proceed were drawn up by a design team and the consultant by reflecting on group member's comments and the response on the Karr Survey. The surveys were grouped by grade level cycles, primary (grades K-3) and intermediate (grades 4-6). The surveys were further sorted by job titles, classroom teachers, supportive service teachers, support staff and administrators.

Looking at the groups who were not classroom teachers, it was noted that few practices were being used, but all groups indicated

a desire for some or lots of training in some component of the listed practices.

The most striking difference was between the primary teachers as a group and the intermediate teachers. The primary teachers indicated they were using a large number of the practices, particularly many of the ones listed under literature and writing. The teachers had some training but a composite review of the comfort strand showed many as not comfortable with the changes. In discussion about this section, the participants felt parents, administrators and their own traditional ingrained methods pressured them into holding back from venturing further. They often relived stories but reverting back to non-Whole Language ways such as teaching phonics in isolation. They knew this was contrary to the adopted restructured curriculum but felt they should use some old methods as a back up in case the new practices didn't work.

The intermediate teachers had used a sprinkling of the techniques. In discussion, they felt many of the items were appropriate for the primary grades but hard to adapt to their grade cycle, such as use of big books and read-aloud time. How could childrens' interest be used to design instruction when they might leave out many of the skills and concepts measured on achievement tests? Their previous training lead them to believe it is best to correct spelling and other writing errors as quickly as possible. Accepting invented spelling was difficult to perceive as a means of improving composition skills. How could instruction be monitored

and made accountable to the district curricular goals? The intermediate teachers still considered the Whole Language approach a viable option. They now had many of their misgivings satisfied. Perhaps with additional professional development their doubts could be put to rest. They most often requested further information about thematic units and the integration of language arts across the curriculum.

It is important to note that while there are some overlapping training needs, there is clear evidence for topic differential by grade cycle. The school staff had taken time to brainstorm, reflect, gather information, and debate the issues involved in this aspect of their new approach. The group was able to use the consultant and the survey to begin to define a building-wide use of the philosophy of the Whole Language approach. Interaction about the practices listed in the five categories bought to light the vast array of practices used in the program. It allowed the respondents to suggest their own comfort level and self-perceived training needs.

The staff commented they were particularly delighted to share their mixed feelings of challenge mixed with anxiety as they ventured away from the tried and true methods. They appeared to respond to the recommendations that they plan for the transition by using formal and informal collegial support groups to help with the maintenance of the commitment, source of information, problem solving and the integrity of the Whole Language Approach. Routman (1988) recounts her own experience in shifting from traditional to

this approach. She feels "we have the capacity to examine, reflect, refine and change." This process used by a broad-based group allows the restructured curriculum to be consistent with current theory and research and the school staff's own philosophy of education.

REFERENCES

Carlton, Leslie. (1975) Self directed dramatization and self concept. Columbus: Merrill Publishing Company.

Froese, Victor. (1991) Whole language: Practice and theory Boston: Allyn and Bacon.

Raines, Shirley C. and Robert J. Canady. (1990) The whole language kindergarten. New York: Teachers College Press.

Routman, Regie. (1988) Transitions. Chicago: Rigby

Name: Jo Ann Karr, Ed.D.
Position: Assistant Professor
Place: Northeastern Illinois University
Department of Curriculum & Instruction
College of Education
5500 N. St. Louis Avenue
Chicago, Illinois 60625-4699

Previous Experience Relative to Article:

Classroom Teacher from 1986 to 1990 in Chicago Public Schools. I was trained in school site management for two years, Project CANAL. This project supported curriculum restructuring. During this time I was school site evaluator as a member of core planning team at Lowell Elementary School. I have conducted workshops and served as consultant for other schools using shared governance models since I have been at the University.